

TRANSLATION THEORIES EXPLORED

# Translation as Metaphor

Rainer Guldin



# TRANSLATION AS METAPHOR

In today's ever-changing climate of disintegration and recombination, translation has become one of the essential metaphors, if not the metaphor, of our globalized world. *Translation as Metaphor* is an attempt to draw a comprehensive map of these new overlapping theoretical territories and the many cross-disciplinary movements they imply. In five chapters, this book examines:

- the main metaphor theories developed in the West
- the way the notion of metaphor relates to the concept of translation
- different theoretical perspectives on metaphors of translation in translation studies
- the main metaphors developed to describe translation in the West and in the East
- spatial metaphors within translation studies, cultural studies and postcolonial theory
- the use of the metaphor of translation across psychoanalysis, anthropology and ethnography, postcolonial theory, history and literature, sociology, media and communication theory, medicine and genetics.

Comprehensive analysis of key metaphor theories, revealing examples from a wide range of sources and a look towards future directions make this is a must-have book for students, researchers and translators working in the areas of translation and translation theory.

**Rainer Guldin** is Lecturer for German Language and Culture at the Faculty of Communication Sciences at the Università della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano (Switzerland). His publications include *Political Landscapes: On the Relationship between Space and National Identity* (2014) and *The Language of the Sky: A History of the Clouds* (2006).

# **TRANSLATION THEORIES EXPLORED**

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*Translation Theories Explored* is a series designed to engage with the range and diversity of contemporary translation studies. Translation itself is as vital and as charged as ever. If anything, it has become more plural, more varied and more complex in today's world. The study of translation has responded to these challenges with vigour. In recent decades the field has gained in depth, its scope continues to expand and it is increasingly interacting with other disciplines. The series sets out to reflect and foster these developments. It aims to keep track of theoretical developments, to explore new areas, approaches and issues, and generally to extend and enrich the intellectual horizon of translation studies. Special attention is paid to innovative ideas that may not as yet be widely known but deserve wider currency.

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# TRANSLATION AS METAPHOR

*Rainer Guldin*

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# PREFACE

This book is part of a larger research context and dates back several years. My interest in the close theoretical link between translation and metaphor began with the work of the Czech–Brazilian philosopher and media theorist Vilém Flusser. Flusser generated his multilingual work through a constant practice of self-translation and envisaged his whole oeuvre as an overarching theory of translation (Guldin 2005). In the following years, I participated in a series of international conferences exploring different aspects related to the central issue of this book: “Self & Identity in Translation” at the University of East Anglia (2006), a panel on sexual identity and translation at the second IATIS conference in Cape Town (2006), the conference “Translation and translation – des faux amis, tracing translation(s) across disciplines” at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul (2007), as well as panels on self-translation and the relationship of translation and geography at the third IATIS conference in Melbourne (2009). The Centre for Translation and Intercultural Studies at the University of Manchester played an important role in the conception and further development of this book. In 2011, I participated in a panel on the relationship between narrative and translation theory, and in February 2013, I presented a seminar on translation as metaphor within philosophy, media theory and cultural studies, which was the actual starting point of this book.

Some parts of the present study are re-elaborations of previously published essays. Section 8 of Chapter 1 (Metaphor and Translation) is based on selected parts of the essay “Metaphor as a Metaphor for Translation” (in James St. André (ed.), *Thinking through Translation with Metaphors*. Manchester: St. Jerome, 2010: 161–91). Section 8 of Chapter 3 (Revisiting the Transference Metaphor of Translation) is based on the essay “Translating Space: On Rivers, Seas, Archipelagos and Straits” (*Flusser Studies* 14, 2012). Finally, Section 2 of Chapter 5 (Media and Communication Theory: Translating Hardware into Software) is a revised and expanded version of the essay “From Transportation to Transformation: On the Use of the

Metaphor of Translation within Media and Communication Theory" (*Global Media Journal*, Canadian edn, 5(1)). I thank the editors for their kind permission to republish parts of these essays in an amended form.

I also want to thank the different editors for their kind permission to use short text passages as epigraphs for the single parts of the book. The epigraphs are from the following sources: Naoki Sakai "Translation as a Filter" (translated from the Japanese by Gavin Walker and Naoki Sakai). In *Transeuropeennes. International Journal of Critical Thought*, March 2010, <http://www.transeuropeennes.eu/en/articles/200> (the epigraph for the book as a whole and the Conclusion); Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002: 24 (Introduction); Michael Cronin, *Translation and Identity*. London: Routledge, 2006: 105 (Chapter 1); Maria Tymoczko, "Western Metaphorical Discourses Implicit in Translation Studies". In James St. André (ed.), *Thinking through Translation with Metaphors*. Manchester: St. Jerome, 2010: 109 (Chapter 2); Anthony Pym, *Method in Translation History*. Manchester: St. Jerome, 1998: 185 (Chapter 3); Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*. London: Routledge, 2014: 6 (Chapter 4); Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, "Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macro-structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them do so". In K. Knorr Cetina and A. Cicourel (eds), *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro- and Macro-Sociologies*. London: Routledge, 1981: 270 (Chapter 5).

I want to thank Paschalis Nikolaou, Christopher Larkosh, Şebnem Bahadır, Dilek Dizdar, Anthony Cordingley, Mona Baker, Maria Tymoczko, Martin J. Eppler, Siobhan Brownlie and James St. André for inspiring me along the way. I also want to thank Erick Piller for his careful reading and copyediting. Finally, I would like to thank Theo Hermans for his many suggestions and Mona Baker for her kind invitation to write this book.

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Lugano, Switzerland, March 2015

When we seek an explanation of translation, we too often and too facilely speak of translation as if its central aim consisted in the transfer of a text written in one language to a text written in another language ... It is difficult to draw narrow conceptual limits around the word 'translation', which is almost always used metaphorically.

*Naoki Sakai*

# INTRODUCTION

But concepts are not fixed. They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach and operational value differ. These processes of differing need to be assessed before, during and after each ‘trip’.

*Mieke Bal*

Throughout the centuries, translation has been described in metaphorical terms, leading to the absorption of foreign elements into the body of theoretical writings on translation and influencing the everyday practice of translators and the ways they have defined themselves. At the same time, the metaphor of translation has been deployed in other discursive domains. The many changes that have taken place in the last few decades have radically redefined the terms of these exchanges, their scope, their socio-political and cultural significance and their theoretical relevance. In the last third of the twentieth century, translation studies came to constitute a separate field of inquiry with a growing body of theoretical work. This has given the notion of translation more visibility in the academic field. The far-reaching reappraisal of translation initiated within translation studies and the neighbouring fields of cultural studies, postcolonial theory and gender studies has been slow to impact other disciplinary fields. Interest in translation, however, has probably never been greater.

Globalization is not only about the dissolution and disappearance of clear-cut political, cultural and linguistic borders; it has also led to a merging and mixing of different disciplines across the globe, linking researchers from different cultures and creating new hybrid interdisciplinary fields on the frontier of the humanities and the natural sciences. In this all-encompassing climate of disintegration and recombination, translation has become a general metaphor for connection, exchange, transfer and transformation. One might say that translation has become one of the essential metaphors, if not *the metaphor*, of our globalized world. It is at this

## 2 Introduction

theoretical juncture that this study positions itself. The book is an attempt to draw a more comprehensive map of these new overlapping theoretical territories and the many cross-disciplinary movements they imply.

The cultural turn in translation studies fundamentally redesigned the significance of translation, emancipating it from the straitjacket of a purely linguistic definition. Something comparable happened within metaphor theory, in which new theoretical approaches, above all cognitive linguistics, emphasized its fundamental significance in everyday life and its essential role in the formulation and transmission of new scientific theories. In the past few years, these parallel and complementary theoretical developments have led to a renewed interest within translation studies in metaphors in general as well as in metaphors for translation. An excellent example of this is the 2010 collection of essays *Thinking through Translation with Metaphors* edited by James St. André. In the present book, I want to take up this new line of inquiry by exploring some further aspects of the multidimensional relationship of metaphor and translation.

Translation and metaphor are related in a number of ways. In the West, the two terms share a common etymological origin and a parallel history. Translation can be a metaphor for metaphor, and conversely, metaphor a metaphor for translation. Metaphors are used to describe the functioning of translation processes, the role of translators and the relationship of original and translation. Add to this the thorny question of the translatability of metaphors and the use of translation as a metaphor in a wide array of disciplines. Finally, metaphor has played an important role in the metalanguage of translation, as has translation in the metalanguage of metaphor theory.

The overall narrative of the book leads from metaphor theory to the use of metaphors in the discourse on translation and from there to the use of metaphors of translation in other discursive areas of both the humanities and the natural sciences. Chapter 1 focuses on a reconstruction of the main metaphor theories developed in the West and the way the notion of metaphor relates to the concept of translation. Chapter 2 proposes a critical reading of the different theoretical perspectives on metaphors of translation in translation studies and considers some of the main metaphors for translation in the West and in the East. Chapter 3 shifts the focus from metaphors for translation to translation as metaphor, from translation as a target domain to translation as a source domain. The emphasis is on the use of spatial metaphors in translation studies and on spatial metaphors of translation in cultural studies and postcolonial theory. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the use of the metaphor of translation across a series of different domains of scholarship and research: in Chapter 4, psychoanalysis, anthropology and ethnography, postcolonial theory, history and literature; in Chapter 5, sociology, media and communication theory, medicine and genetics.

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